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ABSTRACT

In the early 1960s, European adult educators developed a new theoretical model of adult learning called "andragogy." In 1968, Malcolm Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy into U.S. adult education literature and identified four primary assumptions about adult learners: adults become increasingly independent and self-directing; they accumulate experience that becomes a resource for learning; they orient their formal and informal learning around their social and work roles; and they orient their learning toward performance rather than subject. From the early 1970s through the late 1980s, Knowles and other experts in the field of adult education initiated and advanced assumptions, theories, principles, and practices related specifically to characteristics of adult learners and advanced the theory that andragogical theories and principles were applicable to learners of all ages, depending on individual learners' developmental levels and learning situations. Although many authors published in the 1990s support these earlier works, other authors have expressed concerns about the direction of the fields of adult education and learning theory, including language particular to the field, the lack of an acceptable general theory of adult learning, and the need for additional research to validate prior positions and expand knowledge about certain aspects of andragogy. (Contains 38 references.) (MN)

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OVERVIEW OF THEORIES AND PRINCIPLES RELATING TO CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS: 1970s - 1999

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OVERVIEW OF THEORIES AND PRINCIPLES RELATING TO CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS: 1970s - 1990s

INTRODUCTION

From 1607 through the early 1900s adult education in the United States was frequently voluntary, pragmatic, pluralistic, diverse, task oriented, and reflective of events impacting on American society as a whole. Until the early 1900s it functioned within the framework of pedagogal philosophy and practice which historically had been the basis for all education in the United States.

From the 1930s-1960s, experience and research began demonstrating a need for an alternative orientation for the practice of adult education. In the early 60s, a new theoretical model was developed and termed "andragogy" by European adult educators. In the mid 60s, Malcom Knowles learned of the term from an Yugoslavian adult educator and he introduced it into American adult education literature in 1968. In the next decade, the term "andragogy" and the concepts, assumptions, theories, principles and practices associated with this model appeared with increasing frequency in adult education literature published around the world.

During the 60s-70s, a dramatic increase of graduate programs of adult education and development of a professional discipline based on andragogical concepts and theories began to emerge. Currently, this specialty has its own valid and accepted body of knowledge, theories, philosophy, practice and practitioner competencies. Although there is some disagreement among the leaders in adult education about how major issues are being addressed, most agree that (1) the field has become differentiated from other fields of education and has potential for continued growth, recognition, and status as a specialty field of education, and (2) the field addresses societal needs and special client groups (e.g. racial, financial, gender minorities) both within formal institutions as well as through non-institutional forms (e.g. business, military, etc.). (Cyr, 1996)

The purpose of this work is to present an overview of one aspect of this field of adult education, namely the concepts, assumptions, theories, principles and practices relating to characteristics of adult learners advanced from the early 1970s through the 1990s.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

1970s - 1980s

Throughout the early 70s through the late 80s, several authors initiated and advanced assumptions, theories, principles and practices which relate specifically to characteristics of adult learners. They include the following:

Knowles (1970; 1980) introduced the concept of "andragogy," which he defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn." He compared andragogy with pedagogy -- the art and science of teaching children -- which was the traditional teaching method for all learners, regardless of age, prior experience, or developmental level.

Knowles identified four primary assumptions about the characteristics of the adult learner, contending that as adults mature they:
- become increasingly independent and self-directing;
- accumulate experience which becomes a resource for learning;
- orient their formal and informal learning around the developmental tasks of their social and work roles;
- orient their learning toward performance rather than subject.

He theorized that, if given the opportunity, adults prefer to be active participants in all phases of the learning process and that self-directed learning provides this opportunity, encouraging adults to become pro-active, life-long learners. He alleged that the process of applying andragogical assumptions, theory and principles in total programs as well as individual learning activities involves the following process (1980:59):
- the establishment of a climate conducive to adult learning;
- the creation of an organizational structure for participative planning;
- the diagnosis of needs for learning;
- the formulation of directions of learning (objectives);
- the development of a design of activities;
- the operation of the activities;
- the re-diagnosis of needs for learning (evaluation).

Knowles later revised his opinion that andragogy was exclusive to adult learning and alleged that the assumptions listed above were applicable to all learners and could apply to both models. He advocated that the situation determined which model was applicable, not whether the learner is a child or adult. He expanded on his assumptions identified above and developed a comparison of characteristics of what he called the non-adult (dependent/student role) learner vs the adult (non-dependent/member role) learner. A summary of his work in this area follows in chart format.

COMPARISON OF CHARACTERISTICS OF "ADULT" & "NON-ADULT" LEARNERS

	NON-ADULT		ADULT
a.	Learner strongly dependent, "student role"	a.	Learner increasingly independent, "member role.
b.	Other-directed, external discipline, little self-operating in effect.	b.	Self-directed, self-disciplined, self-operating.
c.	Teacher-centered learning; passive-learner.	c.	Student-centered learning; active learner.
d.	Usually has a "correct" answer for most classroom problems studied.	d.	Usually finds no "correct" answer for most problems studied/lived.
e.	Behavior not as rigidly bound by "correct" stereotypes, and tradition; more latitude for behavior.	e.	"Correctness" of behavior more rigid and associated closely with cultural/social stereotypes or tradition.
f.	Not as aware of effects of decisions, therefore more likely to implement solution studied in class in real life situations.	f.	Aware of influence and effects of decision - making/problem solving process, therefore less likely to implement "theoretical" solutions in real life settings.
g.	Less likely to have strongly developed value systems or points of view which may conflict with those of the teacher.	g.	Views and value system of adult usually well developed and may differ from those of teacher leading to conflict in learning setting.
h.	Have less and fewer kinds of life experiences, therefore less likely to be influenced in perception, problem solving and decision making.	h.	Have more and different kinds of life experiences, organized differently, which may block, modify, or otherwise affect perception, problem solving, and decision making.
i.	Investment of time in an activity not usually an important part of decision for involvement in learning activity.	i.	Investment of time in a learning activity may be as important a part of decision for involvement as investment of money or effort.
j.	Varied learning is common.	j.	Active learning is usually practiced in areas of interest, therefore there may be less varied learning activity involvement.

Knowles: 1980; Summarize: A.V.Cyr, 1997.

Kidd (1977) maintained that adults are more likely to participate in learning programs that are held close to work and/or home areas and scheduled at times convenient for the learner. He stated that adults learn most readily if:
- they are aware of the purpose of the task;
- can see the relevance of their learning experience;
- can see the results of their learning involvement.

Edwards (1977) contended that whenever the learning experience involves skill performance, adults prefer that learning objectives be:
- written in behavioral terms (precise instructional statement of what the learner must do and how he/she will do it);
- competency-based (task and standard of performance specified);
- use criterion rather than norm-referenced measurements (learner demonstrates required proficiency for each task, not rank in group).

Knox (1977) hypothesized that when adults engage in purposeful, systematic and sustained learning activities, they are attempting to increase their ability to perform some skill/task related to a life stage. He maintained that:
- almost any adult can learn anything he/she wants to;
- and that adults are constantly engaged in informal and formal learning situations as they attempt to adjust to role changes resulting from developmental stage progression;
- individual characteristics and learning content factors influence/modify learning achievement;
- these factors include physical condition, social adjustment, content relevance, pacing, socioeconomic status, social change, and personal outlook.

Long (1983) cited studies which indicate that adult learners want to:
- set their own learning pace;
- use their own learning style;
- have the learning schedule flexible and adaptable to individual time restraints;
- be able to apply the learning and see immediate results;
- have the learning activities free of coercion from the instructor and/or other learners.

Mast and Van Atta (1986) asserted that adult learners:
- have developed individualized learning styles with which they are comfortable, skilled and satisfied and are not easily persuaded to change them;
- are sensitive about making mistakes in front of their peers and/or those younger and/or less experienced than they and desire non-threatening learning climates;

- may accept pedagogal methods of instruction when in formal learning situations, but do not like them and do not learn as well under such conditions;

They asserted that:

- self-directed learning is an activity for which the learner takes the initiative and responsibility for the learning process;
- this begins to occur when the learner has control over one or more aspect of the learning process, e.g. environment, time, pace, activity etc.

Darling (1986) maintained adults have self-mentoring strategies which they use constantly, but of which they may not be aware and/or believe are not valid learning activities. These include:

- talking to people (questioning and listening strategies);
- reading a book (reading and researching approach);
- watching how people do things (observation);
- taking a class (enrolling in educational programs);
- figuring things out (self-tutoring approach).

Austin (1981:16) seemed to encompass all of the above theories in the following principles of adult learning:

1. Involve the learners in all stages of planning, implementing, and evaluating the programs.
2. Treat each learner as an adult, not a child.
3. Build on the learner's positive experience.
4. Provide choices for the learner.
5. Assist the learners to diagnose their learning needs.
6. Show the learners how to achieve their goals in the easiest way.
7. Encourage the sharing of experience.
8. Help the learner to adjust his or her self-concept to encompass learning as an adult activity.
9. Help the learner to develop problem-solving skills.
10. Provide real-life situations as examples, or have the learner prcvide them.
11. Allow sufficient time for learning.
12. Reinforce each learner's ability to learn.
13. Split a large project into smaller sections.
14. Work to unfreeze old habits before teaching new ones.
15. Provide immediate positive feedback.
16. Do not ridicule work or previous experience.
17. Expect wide variation in reasons for attending offerings.
19. Accommodate set habits in schedule by scheduling breaks.
20. Understand that adults have many things competing for their attention.
21. Provide a variety of learning methods.
22. Teach for the "now."

23. Do not surprise the learner; rather, provide some preparation for each new experience.
24. Be a resource person, not a dictator.
25. Become a participant learner yourself.
26. Accept all learners as persons of worth.
27. Teach so as to promote transfer of learning to other situations.

The positions identified above were supported by not only those recognized experts in this field cited above, but also Klevins (1982), Brookfield (1985), and Rogers (1983). They supported the concept that andragogy is helping human beings to learn and education is a continuing process beginning at birth and ending only with death.

Analysis of the theories and assumptions advanced in the literature cited above leads to the following inferences regarding the characteristics of adult learners:

- adult learners grow increasingly independent and self-directed as they mature;
- adult learners apply life experiences to learning, become increasingly performance-centered, seek learning which is perceived as relevant and attainable and can be immediately applied to attain and maintain desired skills;
- adult learners seek learning as a means of attempting to cope with changes necessitated by changes in developmental/ life stages;
- adults frequently apply valid self-mentoring strategies, of which they may be unaware, to all types of learning situations;
- adult learners prefer to learn at their own pace, in their own way, and at times convenient to their schedules, work and/or home setting;
- adult learners prefer to have learning goals which are clearly stated, measurable, and criterion-referenced;
- adults desire learning methods and conditions that are andrologically oriented;
- adult learners want a physical and psychological learning climate which respects their adult status.

<u>The 1990s</u>

Many of the authors published in the 90s support the earlier works (70s-80s) detailed above. They incorporate the concepts, assumptions, theories, principles and practices introduced by earlier experts into their own work and expand availability of learning experiences using the newest technology, e.g. computer assisted learning programs, software instruction, Internet, etc. These authors include: Bowman, Brookfield, Ewert, Forlizzi, Galbraith, Garrison, Hiemstra, Imel, Merriam, Wlodkowski. An example of this assimilation appears in "Adult Learning Theories" (9/9/99), (adapted from: "Adult Learning Characteristics and Effective Software Instruction": Ference & Vockell), follows.

ADULT LEARNING THEORIES
Pedagogy vs. Angragogy

	PEDAGOGY	ANDRAGOGY
Learner	Dependent	Self-Directed
Learning Experience	Builds on experience	Resource for learning
Orientation to Learning	Subject Centered	Problem Centered
Motivation	External	Internal

CHARACTERISTICS OF ADULT LEARNERS

- Self-directedness toward goals
- Learning in relation to congruence with goals
- Problem (need) centered rather than subject centered
- Need to attach instruction to relevant schema
- Phenomentology: each individual has innate desire to grow and learn
- Stress increases desire for learning (coping response)
- Single topic has more appeal than survey

ACTIVITIES

Suggested activities center on the presentation of a scenario with four strategies, each using universally accepted assumptions, principles and practices of adult learning, e.g. simulation, problem solving, learner participation, and clear identification of end goal(s).

The assumptions described by Knowles (1980) are widely accepted and supported by practitioners currently involved in adult learning. Many of these educators have added a fifth assumption to those advanced by Knowles, which is: (5) the goal of the educational process, particularly adult learning, is to produce self-directed, autonomous lifelong learners.

Several authors published in this decade have expressed some concerns, questions and conclusions about where this area of expertise is heading. They include the following:

Hiemstra (1999) expresses the concern that:

- there is a continuing expansion of the language used in research and discussion related to adult learning strategies, particularly self-directed learning;
- this abundance of terms often confuses newcomers to the field and/or literature base;

- it also strongly indicates the vibrancy and excitement of professionals involved in the field of adult learning.

Brookfield (1995) contends that, despite continuing efforts, the development of an acceptable general theory of adult learning:
- is weak and hindered by the persistence of myths that are etched deeply into adult educators' minds;
- the attempt to construct an exclusive theory of adult learning is a grave error and the time and effort to do this would be better spent in determining how learning occurs and is experienced in a variety of situations.

These positions are supported by many of the authors currently published in literature related to this field including Galbraith (1991), Merriam (1996), and Crafton (1998).

Additionally, some of these authors are introducing questions relating to this field, which include:
- is teaching adults significantly different from other educational methods;
- is andragogy exclusive to what is termed the adult learner rather;
- are practitioners in this field ignoring learning that occurs across the lifespan;
- is too much emphasis being attached to the variable of chronological age and not enough to the variables of culture, ethnicity, personality, political ethos. etc.

Many of the authors identified above advance the following conclusions:
- the art and science of teaching adults – andragogy -- may not be significantly different and/or exclusive to adult learning;
- practitioners in this field may be ignoring learning that occurs across the lifespan;
- to much emphasis may be attached to the variable of chronological age and not enough to the variables of culture, ethnicity, personality, political ethos. etc.;
- there is a continuing expansion of the language used in research and discussion related to adult learning strategies, particularly self-directed learning;
- the abundance of terms relating to adult learning often confuses newcomers to the field and/or literature base;
- a great deal of energy and time is being spent trying to develop an acceptable general theory of adult learning;
- the development of such a theory is weak and hindered by the persistence of myths that are etched deeply into adult educators' minds;
- the attempt to construct an exclusive theory of adult learning is a grave error and the time and effort to do this would be better spent in determining how learning occurs and is experienced in a variety of situations;
- there are strong indicators that there is a vibrancy and excitement among the professionals involved in the field of adult learning;

- there is a need to expand availability of learning experiences using the newest technology, e.g. computer assisted learning programs, software instruction, Internet, etc.;
- there is a need for on-going, in-depth research that is necessary to validate prior and current positions and expand knowledge about the distinctive aspects of andragogy.

Analysis of the hypotheses advanced in the literature produced in the 90s leads to the following inferences:
- throughout this decade, a plethora of material relating to adult learning theories, principles and practices has been published;
- the assumptions, theories, principles and practices advanced in the 70s and 80s are still considered the foundation of the field of adult learning;
- many authors have assimilated and build on work produced by experts in this field in the 70s-80s, using new technology available, e.g. computer assisted learning programs, Internet, etc.;
- new terms and descriptions are being added to the lexicon of adult learning, confusing new or inexperienced practitioners;
- many authors are identifying and reporting concerns and questions being articulated by practitioners in the field;
- many authors are also portraying the excitement and vibrancy being communicated by these practitioners;
- there is a need for on-going and in-depth research to validate prior positions and expand knowledge about the distinctive aspects of andragogy.

SUMMARY

In the early 60s, responding to a demonstrated need for an alternative orientation for the practice of adult education, a new theoretical model was developed and termed "andragogy" by European adult educators. In 1968, Malcom Knowles introduced the concept of andragogy (which he defined as "the art and science of helping adults learn") into American adult education literature. He compared andragogy with pedagogy (defined as the art and science of teaching children), which was the traditional teaching method for all learners, regardless of age, prior experience, or developmental level. He identified four primary assumptions about the characteristics of the adult learner which were widely accepted and implemented by practitioners in this field.

Throughout the early 70s through the late 80s, Knowles and other experts in this field initiated and advanced assumptions, theories, principles and practices which relate specifically to characteristics of adult learners. They supported the concept that andragogy is helping human beings to learn and education is a continuing process beginning at birth and ending only with death. They also advanced the

theory that andragogical theories, assumptions, principles and practices were not exclusive to "adult" learners but were applicable to learners of all ages, depending on the developmental level of the learner and the learning situation.

The assumptions described by Knowles are widely accepted and supported by practitioners currently involved in adult learning. Many of these educators have added a fifth assumption to those advanced by Knowles, which is: (5) the goal of the educational process, particularly adult learning, is to produce self-directed, autonomous lifelong learners.

Many of the authors published in the 90s support the earlier works published in the 70s and 80s. They have incorporated the concepts, assumptions, theories, principles and practices introduced by earlier experts into their own work and support expanded availability of learning experiences using the newest technology, e.g. computer assisted learning programs, software instruction, Internet, etc.

Several authors published in this decade have expressed some concerns, questions and conclusions about where this area of expertise is heading including language particular to this field, the lack of an acceptable general theory of adult learning, the need for additional research to validate prior positions and expand knowledge about the distinctive aspects of andragogy. They agree that throughout this decade, a plethora of material relating to adult learning theories, principles and practices has been published, that the assumptions, theories, principles and practices advanced in the 70s and 80s are still considered the foundation of the field of adult learning, that many authors have assimilated and build on work produced by experts in this field in the 70s-80s, using new technology available, e.g. computer assisted learning programs, Internet, etc. and that there appears to be a vibrancy and excitement of professionals involved in the field of adult learning being communicated by these practitioners and portrayed in today's literature.

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